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ABSTRACT

This booklet contains questions that are intended to serve as a starting point for asking meaningful questions about the quality of the first year of college so that a two-year college campus can enhance the learning, satisfaction, and retention of new college students. The previous edition considered the first-year experience for both two-year and four-year institutions; this edition focuses on the two-year college campus. The questions are grouped into the following sections: (1) Academics; (2) Campus Administration, Organization, Policies, and Climate; (3) Campus Processes, Procedures, and Activities; and (4) Student Life and Campus Services. The questions center on recruitment/admissions, financial aid, orientation processes, institutional research, and aspects of the campus environment. (SLD)

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The First-Year Experience at Two-Year Colleges

(2nd Edition)

John N. Gardner

Betsy O. Barefoot

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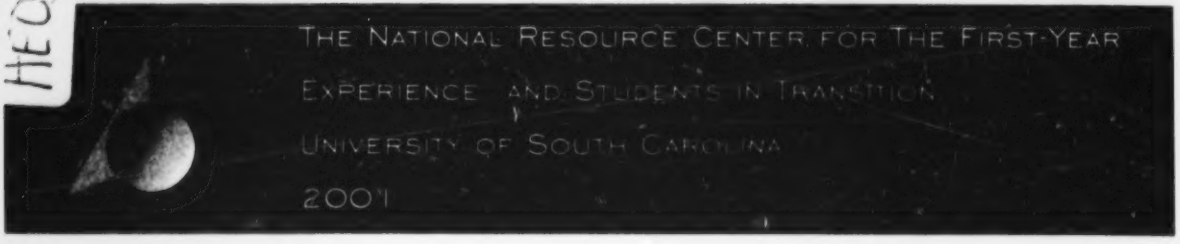
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University of South Carolina
2001

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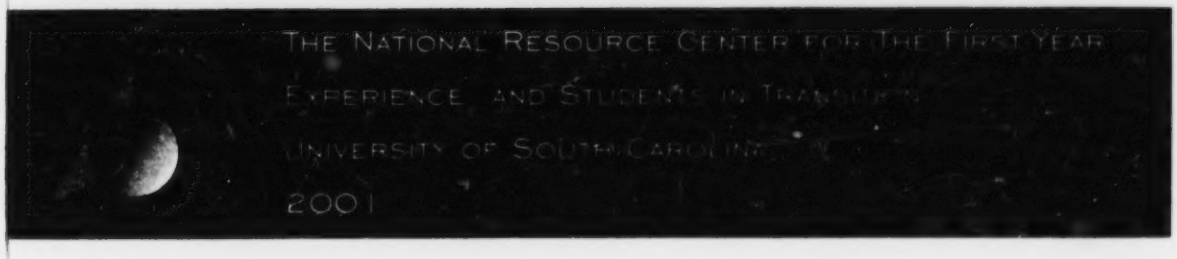
THE NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR THE FIRST-YEAR
EXPERIENCE AND STUDENTS IN TRANSITION
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA
2001

These guidelines were developed by John N. Gardner, Executive Director of the Policy Center on the First Year of College, with the assistance of Betsy O. Barefoot and Randy L. Swing, Co-Directors of the Policy Center. The Policy Center on the First Year of College is supported by a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts and is based at Brevard College (Brevard, NC).

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Additional copies of *Guidelines* may be ordered at $7.00 each from the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, University of South Carolina, 1629 Pendleton Street, Columbia, SC 29208. Telephone (803) 777-6029. Telefax (803) 777-4699.

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Table of Contents

Editor's Note 4

Preface 5

Suggested Processes for Using *Guidelines for Evaluating The First-Year Experience* 7

Academics 9

Support for Unique Student Subpopulations 11

Campus Administration, Organization, Policies, and Climate 13

Campus Processes, Procedures, and Activities 14

Student Life and Campus Services 17

Contact Information 20

Editor's Note

The first edition, *Guidelines for Evaluating the Freshman Year Experience*, was written in 1990 by John N. Gardner and published by the National Resource Center for the Freshman Year Experience, University of South Carolina. The development of the expanded two- and four-year second editions was undertaken through grant support of The Pew Charitable Trusts and was the result of the collaborative input of Gardner, Betsy O. Barefoot, and Randy L. Swing of the Pew-funded Policy Center on the First Year of College located at Brevard College. Gardner, Barefoot, and Swing also received feedback on the second editions from 65 institutions in the states of North Carolina, Georgia, and Virginia. As members of five regional first-year assessment consortia, these institutions piloted the use of *Guidelines* in a structured assessment process and provided suggestions for change that have been incorporated in these second editions.

Preface

The first college year is a composite of many events, structures, and processes, both intentional and unintentional, that are common, yet unique, on American campuses. The following blueprint of questions, designed specifically for use by public and private two-year colleges, can be used by an institution-wide task force looking at the first-year experience and/or the broader campus experience. This blueprint can also be used to aid in an overall process of campus self-study or assessment. A version of *Guidelines* is also available for four-year colleges and universities.

Guidelines is intended as a starting point for asking meaningful questions about the quality of the first year so that your campus can enhance the learning, success, satisfaction, and retention of new college students. Although the guidelines are grounded in a set of beliefs, assumptions, and values about the importance of the first year of college, they are not meant to be prescriptive or inclusive; some items may not be relevant to a particular setting, and other questions may need to be added to this list. It is our hope that, in responding to these questions, two-year college educators will recognize areas ripe for change and will set in motion plans to make improvements as needed. We also hope that institutional users will resist the tendency to get bogged down in overanalyzing "the problem" and will instead take immediate steps to correct deficiencies. Our first-year students deserve no less.

John N. Gardner
Betsy O. Barefoot
Randy L. Swing

Suggested Process for Using *Guidelines for Evaluating The First-Year Experience*

This is just a *suggested* process. Campuses should develop, according to their needs, interests, strengths, and unique cultures, the specific evaluation process that is most appropriate.

1. Select a task force to focus on the nature of your campus's first-year experience. Ideally, this task force should be composed of participants from all areas of the campus (faculty, academic administrators, student affairs professionals, institutional researchers and assessment professionals, and students).

2. Determine who will serve as chair and in other positions as necessary.

3. Send each member of the task force a copy of *Guidelines,* and request that members review it before an initial meeting.

4. In its first meeting, the task force should determine the following with reference to the questions in *Guidelines* or in regard to other first-year issues that might emerge:

- What do you already know about the institution's first-year experience? What do you need to know, but don't currently know?

- What are the institution's greatest strengths? What are the institution's most critical weaknesses?

- Is additional information needed to make a judgment about strengths or weaknesses? If so, in which areas is this information needed?

- Which three or four areas are most critical and need / require immediate focus, analysis, and possible change? The point is to keep the focus of the process manageable. You may appropriately choose not to take on all aspects of the first year and instead concentrate on selected components you deem most in need of your immediate attention.

- What data are needed in order to conduct a thorough problem analysis, and where are those data available?

- What external help is needed with assessing these areas and making recommendations for change?

5. Divide large task forces into smaller working subcommittees as needed to study issues in depth and make recommendations for change.

6. Either working in small subcommittees or in a large group, collect available qualitative and/or quantitative data on the problems selected for further study.

7. Develop possible solutions to the problems.

8. Meet again with the task force to develop suggested plans of action for change in the areas determined to be most critical.

9. During the period of their work, working committees should meet at least once every two weeks to refine the process of assessment, share findings, and develop strategies for further work. The larger task force should convene at least once a month to hear reports from the smaller committees and share ideas.

Academics

The Formal Curriculum

How is the first-year curriculum structured? Do departments or units have desired learning outcomes for first-year students within various programs?

If students take general education or liberal arts courses, is there an integrated academic experience designed to explain the value of these areas of the curriculum?

Is there some academic experience that is shared by all first-year students?

Are writing, speaking, and technology use integrated as intentional components of first-year classes across the curriculum?

Are first-year students introduced to the process and value of critical thinking in first-year courses?

When, how, and by whom are first-year students taught to use the library and technology? How effective is this instruction?

Does your college offer or require a first-year seminar? Is this course evaluated according to established goals, and are instructors who teach the seminar provided adequate training and support?

What is the faculty/student ratio in introductory courses? Is this a desirable ratio?

Does your institution have an attendance policy? Does that policy set higher standards for attendance in first-year courses? Has your campus undertaken any kind of study of classroom attendance patterns, especially for Friday classes and first-year courses in general?

Faculty Issues

Who (full-time, part-time, adjunct, tenured, or untenured faculty) is teaching first-year courses across the curriculum? Are these individuals representative of the best teaching faculty on your campus?

Are faculty/staff development programs offered and/or required to enhance first-year instruction and student support? Are such programs offered/and or required for adjunct faculty?

Are all faculty who teach first-year students accessible? Does the institution provide these faculty office space, e-mail accounts, and telephone numbers?

Pedagogy

Are faculty encouraged to take risks and experiment with new, interactive pedagogical methods in first-year classes (i.e., group learning, service learning, use of technology)?

Within designated "high-risk" courses, is extra support available for students (e.g., tutoring, Supplemental Instruction, required group study)?

Has your institution considered the creation of and/or implemented learning communities (i.e., the linking of two or more courses across the curriculum) for cohorts of first-year students?

Have faculty designed service-learning courses for first-year students across the curriculum?

How is technology being integrated into instruction? Does every student have ready access to a computer, the Internet, and the World Wide Web?

Academic Advising and Tutorial Assistance

Overall, how would you rate your campus's system of academic advising? What is its current structure (e.g., faculty

advising only, centralized professional advising only, a mixture), and how well does this structure work?

Are new students required to see an academic advisor before registering for classes? Is it possible for new students to circumvent the "system" and register without having been advised?

Are academic advisors on your campus trained, evaluated, and rewarded? Does advising count in your institution's system of tenure and promotion?

Does your college have an early warning alert system to identify first-year students in early academic difficulty and to refer them for appropriate counseling and other types of support?

Is academic support available through a learning assistance center that makes extensive use of trained professional developmental educators as well as peer tutors?

Is there a program or office that provides special attention and support for students who are on academic probation, and/or whose GPAs may soon place them on probation or suspension, and/or who may have been readmitted upon completion of academic suspension?

Is your institution active in the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA)? Contact information can be found on page 20.

Support for Unique Student Subpopulations

Assistance for Diverse Student Groups

Which students at your institution—with respect to race, ethnic group, gender, or sexual orientation—are most likely to feel alienated or marginalized by higher education in general or by their experience on your particular campus? What kinds of services and support mechanisms are available to help these students make a

successful first-year transition? How would you rate your campus's comfort level for diverse student groups?

Assistance for Students with Disabilities

Are all your campus facilities accessible to first-year students with physical disabilities?

Does your institution offer diagnosis of learning disabilities or assistance for students who have diagnosed learning disabilities? Are faculty made aware of ways to recognize a possible learning disability? Do faculty know what accommodations should be made in the classroom for students with diagnosed learning disabilities?

Assistance for Developmental Students

Is there a systematic placement process designed to identify students likely to be unsuccessful in entry-level courses?

Is placement into developmental courses based upon a single measure or multiple measures?

Are developmental course completion and placement procedures evaluated periodically?

Has research been conducted to determine whether successful completion of developmental coursework prepares students to enter the first-year curriculum?

Are instructors compensated equally for teaching developmental and non-developmental courses?

Have instructors in developmental courses participated in faculty development activities that prepare them for the special needs of developmental students?

Are developmental instructors at your institution active in the National Association for Developmental Education (NADE)? Contact information can be found on page 20.

Campus Administration, Organization, Policies, and Climate

Administration, Organization, Leadership

Who, if anyone, is "in charge" of the first year on your campus?

Is there any kind of standing committee that oversees or advises the units with direct responsibility for various aspects of the first year?

To what extent is the top administrative leadership of your campus involved with first-year students? Do the president, chief academic officer, chief student affairs officer, and other administrative officials welcome students to campus, participate in orientation, teach or lecture in a first-year seminar or other first-year courses?

Is there an effective partnership among faculty, academic administrators, student affairs administrators, and institutional researchers especially in relation to first-year programs and policies?

Institutional Policies

To what extent is your campus mission statement relevant to the first-year experience, and how is that relevance communicated to all campus constituent groups, including the students themselves? How is the mission statement used to guide the content and execution of the first year?

Is there intentional integration of curricular and co-curricular programs and activities?

Can your campus identify individuals—faculty or staff—who have been champions or advocates for first-year students? Do these individuals receive positive recognition from their peers, and are they rewarded for their accomplishments?

Has your campus defined what is meant by "new student success"? Relative to this definition, what should new students

on your campus experience, and how can this be assured? What kinds of resources are necessary to facilitate these experiences, and are those resources available and allocated to support new students?

Does your institution seek and use feedback on the first-year experience from the perspectives of various groups, including the students themselves and their family members?

How does the first year lay the foundation for desired student outcomes? How well does your college prepare students who wish to transfer to a four-year institution?

Campus Climate

At all points of interface between new students and your institution (recruitment, admissions, financial aid, food service, advising, the classroom), do campus employees convey respect, caring, and competence? Does the campus, through its policies, actions, and symbols, welcome and support new students, especially those who historically have been excluded from higher education?

What efforts do you make to inform new students of your campus's definition of and policies regarding sexual harassment?

In light of the fact that on most campuses female students are in the majority but are taught primarily by male faculty, what is the current climate for women students on your campus? Has this been a subject of any formal study and policy making at your institution?

Campus Processes, Procedures, and Activities

Recruitment/Admissions

On your campus, is there an office and philosophy for comprehensive, integrated enrollment management from pre-matriculation through the first year, and in some matters, such as financial aid, through to program completion or graduation?

Does preparation for the first year begin prior to matriculation vis à vis area school/college collaboration to prepare students from feeder high schools for the collegiate experience (e.g., connections between faculty within disciplines, bringing K-12 students to campus, implementation of federal programs such as Talent Search or Upward Bound)?

What are prospective first-year students told during the process of recruitment and admissions? What information about your campus is provided through its web site and/or viewbooks? Does campus reality conform to the recruitment picture? Does your institution keep its recruitment promises?

Have campus employees at all levels read the viewbook or seen the web site? Have they been made aware of what new students have been led to expect, and are they prepared to deliver on such expectations?

Do recruiters and admissions officers have any opportunity after matriculation for subsequent contact and interaction with the students whom they recruit?

In the processes of recruitment and admissions, does your institution consider the issue of "institutional fit," or does the campus attempt to be "all things to all people"? If the campus admits students with academic deficiencies or other special needs, are support programs in place to help those students achieve success?

Financial Aid

What percent of your first-year students currently receive institutional and/or federal/state aid?

What is the current median amount of indebtedness incurred by your students at various levels? Are your faculty and staff made aware of such financial realities of your students and their families?

What percent of your full-time, first-year students are working part-time or full-time?

Given the significant role that financial problems play in attrition and the critical role of the Financial Aid Office vis à vis

student satisfaction, how adequate is the current level of staffing for student service support by the Financial Aid Office?

What is your institution's current student loan default rate?

Orientation

Does your college have a well-developed, intentional process of orienting new students?

Does administering orientation involve a partnership between academic and student affairs?

Is there a standing committee of representatives from academic units who advise those responsible for orientation?

Is orientation required for all new students? If not, what percentage of new students participates?

Are faculty, student affairs staff, and outstanding upperclass students involved in orientation?

What are the criteria for selecting student orientation leaders? How are they trained, and how are they evaluated?

Does new student orientation include academic activities in addition to testing and placement (e.g., a common reading experience, lectures, or presentations by faculty)?

Within the total orientation program, are there special sessions or activities for unique, homogeneous student populations (e.g., minority students, international students)?

Does orientation include programs and activities for families of new students?

Is there any mechanism for accomplishing "extended" or "continuing" orientation (e.g., as in a first-year orientation course)?

Is your institution active in the National Orientation Directors Association (NODA)? Contact information can be found on page 20.

Institutional Research

What database of demographic information is currently available on new students? How is that information used in addition to standard governmental reporting? Is the current database sufficient? If not, what kinds of additional data would be useful?

Does your college systematically monitor retention/attrition rates and, if so, by what independent variables? Does the institution have a clear profile of those new students who are likely to be retained versus those who are likely to drop out?

Does your campus know what happens to students who leave before completing their programs (dropouts versus transfers)?

Does your college measure desired outcomes in addition to retention (e.g., changes in student attitudes and abilities, learning, satisfaction)?

Development of Common Culture and Campus Community

Prior to the beginning of the first term, what efforts are made to transmit to new students the culture and expectations of your campus?

Do campus rituals, ceremonies, convocations, symbols, special functions, or receptions celebrate the arrival of new students?

Are there activities throughout the first year that build a strong sense of campus community and/or impart campus values (e.g., common readings, campus creed or statement of ethics, common social functions)?

Student Life and Campus Services

Co-curricular Activities and Resources

To what extent and through what mechanisms are first-year students encouraged to get involved in co-curricular activities such as student government, campus publications, and campus clubs?

What kinds of opportunities are available for first-year students to develop or hone their leadership interests and abilities(e.g., first-year student council, for-credit leadership courses, leadership programs, community service)?

Are new students intentionally made aware of or required to use various campus resources such as career counseling, learning skills centers, writing centers, personal counseling, student health services, and fitness programs?

What efforts have been made to identify and design activities for unique homogeneous populations of first-year students (e.g., commuters, athletes, honors, adult, disabled, minority or international students)? What special programs are available to support these students?

Does your campus offer child care services to students with small children?

Are offices and support services open and available during all the times students are on your campus (including evenings and weekends)?

Campus Problems and Issues

Has your institution identified particular issues or campus problems of special concern to first-year students (e.g., racial and cultural diversity, drug and alcohol use, sexually transmitted infections, vandalism and safety issues, sexual assault, town/gown relationships, parking, commuting issues, child care)? Have resources been committed to addressing and/or alleviating these concerns?

Does your campus offer new students a structured forum, such as a first-year seminar, within which to discuss such issues?

Sponsored Programs, Institutional Advancement, and Fund Raising

What kind of priority has been given the first college year in your campus's efforts to seek federal and foundation grants and private gifts?

What successes has your institution had in this arena?

What level of awareness is there of external funding available to support first-year initiatives?

Is there an office/individual charged with this development responsibility?

Contact Information

National Academic Advising Association (NACADA)
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Kansas State University
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National Association for Developmental Education (NADE)
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